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ABSTRACT

In August 1998, the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), North Carolina, adopted a goal statement that specified that by 2003, 95% of students tested would be at or above grade level as measured by the North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) tests at grades 3 and 8. This report defines that goal operationally and defines the terms used to describe it. It also identifies improvements that have occurred during the past 6 years and disaggregates the current level of achievement for a variety of groups. Student scores on the EOG tests are reported on scales that are divided into four levels. Students scoring at the first two levels probably lack basic skills, but those scoring in Levels III and IV probably have the skills needed for the next grade level, and are considered "at or above" grade level. During the past 6 years, WCPSS has shown gradual improvement in the percentage of students at or above grade level. The percentage of students who were at or above grade level in reading improved from 71% in 1994 to 87% in 1999. In mathematics, the improvement was from 72% to 84%. The percentage of scores that were below grade level in 1998 varied greatly by subject, grade, and demographic group. Poverty was the single strongest predictor of low achievement. The school system's goal is close to being achieved with some groups of students, but the system still has a long way to go for others. Information is given about the students who take the test and students in need of special assistance. (SLD)

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MEASURING UP

August 1999

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Wake County Public Schools

Evaluation and Research Department

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MEASURING UP

WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS EVALUATION AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

E&R Report No. 99.32

August 1999

Progress Towards the 95% Goal

In August, 1998, the Wake County Board of Education adopted the following goal statement: ***"By 2003, 95% of students tested will be at or above grade level as measured by NC EOG testing at grades 3 and 8."*** This goal has become the focus for alignment of school improvement efforts, community involvement, and resource allocation. Over the next few years it will be important to monitor progress toward accomplishment of the goal and to understand where we may be failing to achieve necessary improvement. This report operationally defines the goal and terms used to describe it, identifies improvement that has occurred during the past six years, and disaggregates the current level of achievement for a variety of groups.

What Do We Mean By "At or Above Grade Level"?

Student scores on EOG tests are reported on scales that are divided into four levels. Students scoring in Levels I and II probably lack some basic skills needed for success at the next grade level and are considered to be scoring below grade level. Students scoring in Levels III and IV probably have the skills needed for success in the next grade level and are "at or above grade level." North Carolina students take End-of-Grade (EOG) tests in Reading and Mathematics in grades 3 and 8. Therefore, there are really *four* targets for achievement articulated in the goal statement. The Board of Education wants at least 95% of students tested to be at or above grade level in the 2002-03 school year on the tests for**: third grade reading, eighth grade reading, third grade math, and eighth grade math.**

Progress Over Time

EOG tests were first given in 1993. During the past six years, WCPSS has shown gradual improvement in the percentage of students at or above grade level, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Percent of WCPSS EOG Scores "at or above grade level"

	Reading		Mathematics	
	Grade Three	Grade Eight	Grade Three	Grade Eight
1993	74.0	76.0	72.0	75.0
1994	71.4	78.7	71.8	74.3
1995	74.4	84.0	73.5	83.2
1996	76.3	82.8	76.9	80.6
1997	75.3	83.3	76.8	79.0
1998	79.3	86.4	75.4	83.2
1999	80.4	87.1	77.1	83.8

Improvement Across Cohorts. Part of the variation in test scores from year to year is due to differences in each cohort of students. Third-grade students one year may be different in important ways from third-grade students the following year. Therefore, following a cohort of students as they move up through the grade levels is one important way of looking for improvement. A majority of the eighth-grade students in 1999 were in third grade in 1994. As shown, the percent of students in that cohort who were at or above grade level in reading improved from 71% in 1994 to 87% in 1999. In mathematics, the improvement was from 72% to 84%.

Rate of Improvement. Another way to assess progress is to examine how much achievement in the district would improve if the current rates of improvement continue for four years (to 2003). Improvements in the early years of EOG testing were larger than in recent years. This pattern makes sense if you consider that teachers in the early years were adjusting to the new, higher expectations reflected by the EOG tests. Additional gains in the mid-1990s probably resulted from implementation of financial incentives and sanctions tied to the state's ABCs accountability plan.

It is likely that the "easiest" gains are behind us. In other words, those students who could reach grade level with only the currently funded amounts and types of additional help have already done so. Students who still have not reached grade level are going to require more and possibly different types of assistance. For this reason, the gains between 1998 and 1999 may be a better indicator of the "new" rate of improvement, assuming no additional resources or strategies are provided, than gains in earlier years. The 1999 reading improvements were 1.1% and 0.7 % in grades 3 and 8, respectively, while the math gains were 1.7% and 0.6%, respectively. At this rate of improvement, scores for 2003 would be approximately as shown in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2. Projected Percentages at Grade Level for 2003
(assuming no changes in rate of improvement)

Reading		Mathematics	
Grade 3	Grade 8	Grade 3	Grade 8
84.8	89.9	83.9	86.2

Who is Tested?

The phrase "at least 95% of students tested" implies that some students will not be tested, and, in fact, every year some students are exempted from EOG testing for two possible reasons:

1. Students with educational disabilities may have Individual Education Programs (IEPs) that indicate that EOG standardized testing is inappropriate. IEPs exempting students from testing are written by school-based teams that include students' parents.

2. Students with limited English proficiency (LEP) may be exempted from EOG testing for the first two years they are served by a North Carolina school. After two years, students must take the test, regardless of their English proficiency.

A few students each year are absent from testing and cannot be scheduled for a makeup test before the end of the school year. Absence rates are larger in middle schools because of suspensions and truancy. Figure 4 shows that between 3.3% and 4.8% of students were exempted or absent from one or both of the EOG tests given in 1999, and were not tested. A comparison of Figures 3 and 4 shows that absenteeism and exemptions increased slightly from 1998 to 1999, with most of the increase coming in the LEP (Limited English Proficient) category.

Figure 3: WCPSS Students Exempted or Absent From EOG Tests In 1998

Grade Level	Enrollment May 1998	Test	Total Tested	IEP Exempted	LEP Exempted	Absent	Percent Not Tested
Grade 3	7781	Reading	7470	205	88	15	4.0%
		Math	7493	187	83	13	3.6%
Grade 8	6496	Reading	6318	80	48	48	2.7%
		Math	6315	81	78	49	2.7%

Figure 4: WCPSS Students Exempted or Absent From EOG Tests In 1999

Grade Level	Enrollment May 1999	Test	Total Tested	IEP Exempted	LEP Exempted	Absent	Percent Not Tested
Grade 3	7993	Reading	7609	239	123	22	4.8%
		Math	7634	218	119	22	4.5%
Grade 8	6822	Reading	6586	94	71	71	3.5%
		Math	6597	93	69	63	3.3%

Under the North Carolina ABCs Accountability Program, schools are required to test at least 98% of eligible (non-exempted) students. Schools failing to test at least 98% of eligible students lose their incentive awards. While there is no specific limit regarding the number of students who are exempted under the IEP or LEP provisions, schools with high numbers of exemptions are required to explain their exemptions and may be audited to make sure proper procedures were followed in granting the exemptions.

How Many Students Will Need Special Assistance?

Students scoring below grade level on EOG tests need special assistance so they can accelerate their growth and reach grade level in subsequent years. The number of students needing special assistance has both policy and financial implications. Students may be below grade level on ***one*** of the tests and not the other, or they may be below grade level on ***both*** tests. When both tests (Reading and Mathematics) are examined together, the total number of students needing help is greater than the number of students below grade level on either one of the tests alone.

Figure 5 shows the number of students who scored in Level I or II on ***either*** of the EOG tests in 1998 and 1999. These are the students for whom schools plan remediation efforts.

Figure 5: Number of Students in Levels I or II on EOG Reading or Math Tests							
		Grade 3		Grade 8		Grade 3-8	
		1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
All Students		2,222	2,146	1,269	1,308	10,046	9,422
Income	F/R Lunch	1,136	1,116	609	592	5,025	4,810
	Not F/R Lunch	1,086	1,030	660	716	5,021	4,612
Gender	Male	1,147	1,163	705	708	5,379	5,114
	Female	1,075	983	564	600	4,667	4,308
Race	White	862	818	451	434	3,708	3,279
	Black	1,210	1,157	743	801	5,702	5,446
	Hispanic	98	103	40	43	392	435
	Asian	34	30	27	19	150	143
	Native American	7	5	3	1	29	22
	Other	11	33	5	10	65	97
Special Programs	LD	366	367	303	315	2,105	2,055
	B/EH	33	34	68	59	298	281
	Speech/Language	100	73	13	13	226	191

Under the Accelerated Learning Program planned for 1999-2000, schools will implement extended school days, Saturday Academies, tutor/mentor programs, special classes, and other forms of intervention. These interventions are intended to move students towards the goal. Learning Disabled (LD) students may need very different forms of support and intervention than other at-risk students (e.g., minority males from low income families.) One important indicator of progress will be whether the numbers of students in ***all*** of the categories shown above grow smaller over time. Achievement of the goal will require that all students benefit from intervention efforts.

Patterns of Need By Subject, Grade Level, and Subgroup

The percentage of scores that were below grade level in 1998 varied greatly by subject, grade, and demographic group. Figures 6 and 7 show the percentage of scores that were below grade level on the 1998 and 1999 administrations of the EOG tests in grades 3 and 8 for several student groups. The data in these tables show numbers and percentages of students needing assistance in each grade level and subject.

Poverty (as measured by eligibility for free or reduced price lunch) is the single strongest predictor of low student achievement. As shown in Figure 8, the impact of poverty seems to vary across different demographic groups, grade levels, and academic subjects. Figure 8 shows the school system's progress toward the 95% goal for various subgroups. As shown, the goal is already being achieved or is close to being achieved with some groups of students, while the school system still has far to go if the goal is be to achieved with other groups.

Figure 6: Third Grade Reading and Math Scores Below Grade Level									
		Third Grade Reading				Third Grade Math			
		# of Students		Percent of Group		# of Students		Percent of Group	
		1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
All Students		1,526	1,490	20.5%	19.6%	1,829	1,748	24.5%	22.9%
Income	F/R	841	826	47.9%	46.2%	989	948	55.9%	52.5%
	Not F/R	685	664	12.1%	11.4%	840	800	14.8%	13.7%
Gender	Male	831	858	22.3%	21.8%	924	925	24.6%	23.4%
	Female	695	632	18.8%	17.2%	905	823	24.4%	22.3%
Race	White	565	526	11.2%	10.5%	650	617	12.9%	12.3%
	Black	866	837	45.4%	42.3%	1,050	1,001	54.7%	50.3%
	Hispanic	68	78	36.8%	37.1%	84	80	44.4%	36.9%
	Asian	17	28	7.1%	10.5%	28	16	11.6%	6.0%
	Nat Amer	3	3	15.8%	13.0%	7	4	36.8%	16.7%
	Other	7	18	12.5%	15.5%	10	30	17.9%	25.6%
Special Programs	LD	303	307	57.7%	56.0%	289	276	53.1%	48.8%
	B/EH	29	28	70.7%	58.3%	24	30	57.1%	60.0%
	SI/LI	81	54	29.6%	19.6%	82	61	29.9%	22.2%

Figure 7: Eighth Grade Reading and Math Scores Below Grade Level									
		Eighth Grade Reading				Eighth Grade Math			
		# of Students		Percent of Group		# of Students		Percent of Group	
		1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
All Students		841	849	13.4%	12.9%	1,041	1,065	16.6%	16.1%
Income	F/R	428	420	38.2%	38.5%	524	493	46.9%	45.2%
	Not F/R	413	429	8.0%	7.8%	517	572	10.0%	10.4%
Gender	Male	500	487	15.8%	14.6%	571	563	18.0%	16.8%
	Female	341	362	10.9%	11.1%	470	502	15.1%	15.4%
Race	White	292	252	6.6%	5.5%	335	319	7.6%	6.9%
	Black	499	545	33.0%	33.7%	651	693	43.1%	42.8%
	Hispanic	29	28	24.4%	24.6%	31	34	26.1%	29.6%
	Asian	16	17	8.4%	7.8%	16	11	8.4%	5.0%
	Nat Amer	2	0	16.7%	0%	3	1	25.0%	7.7%
	Other	3	7	11.1%	17.1%	5	7	19.2%	17.5%
Special Programs	LD	241	243	44.1%	42.3%	263	259	49.3%	48.3%
	B/EH	53	43	63.1%	55.8%	61	50	73.5%	65.8%
	SI/LI	10	11	66.7%	64.7%	12	12	80.0%	70.6%

Figure 8: Percent of EOG Reading and Math Scores At or Above Grade Level For Selected Demographic Groups

			Third Grade				Eighth Grade			
			Reading		Math		Reading		Math	
			1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
Students Not Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunches	Males	White	89%	90%	89%	90%	93%	95%	93%	94%
		Black	65%	67%	57%	63%	73%	72%	66%	64%
		Asian	97%	88%	93%	96%	96%	96%	96%	97%
		Hispanic	90%	75%	72%	82%	76%	81%	82%	81%
	Females	White	93%	92%	90%	89%	96%	96%	95%	94%
		Black	71%	81%	61%	68%	83%	81%	74%	70%
		Asian	97%	96%	87%	96%	94%	97%	88%	98%
		Hispanic	79%	81%	75%	79%	89%	94%	74%	90%
Students Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunches	Males	White	67%	69%	65%	63%	70%	80%	67%	78%
		Black	42%	41%	36%	36%	51%	51%	39%	41%
		Asian	74%	72%	83%	84%	78%	71%	82%	86%
		Hispanic	56%	48%	42%	45%	67%	35%	74%	44%
	Females	White	67%	73%	58%	69%	80%	85%	71%	82%
		Black	51%	53%	38%	43%	62%	59%	51%	51%
		Asian	67%	80%	69%	87%	60%	73%	100%	80%
		Hispanic	46%	55%	46%	56%	72%	83%	66%	54%